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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WARSAW 000812

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL GA PL

SUBJECT: NEW FRIENDS OF GEORGIA CALL FOR MAP, LESS RUSSIA,
MORE EU

Classified By: Polcouns F. Daniel Sainz for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On June 25, DAS Bryza participated in the "New Friends of Georgia" (NFG) conference along with Foreign Ministers, State Secretaries or Special Representatives from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, NATO, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden and the EU Council. The NFG discussed possible strategies for reducing tensions in Abkhazia while reaffirming Georgian sovereignty. Participating NATO members all expressed strong support for offering a membership action plan (MAP) to Georgia this December at NATO's foreign ministerial. However, given opposition from other NATO states they tabled alternatives including: greater EU involvement, deferring action until NATO's 60th anniversary events, or authoring a joint NATO-Georgia statement. Others suggested that the UNGA might serve as a platform to express support for Georgia. Georgia itself preferred MAP over the alternatives, but given EU engagement, there was a willingness to employ multinational police in Abkhazia and be flexible on a conflict resolution process. However, Georgia drew a hard line against then-President Putin's April 16 decree authorizing direct official relations with secessionist entities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. END SUMMARY

NATO's Role: NFG Agree MAP Desirable But Unlikely

¶2. (C) Deliberations began with a strong push for offering MAP to Georgia. FM Sikorski noted that the current "promise of eventual membership with no institutional structure" invited Russian mischief. Georgian FM Ekaterine Tkeshelashvili acknowledged "shortcomings" in recent elections but noted "the test has been passed." She expressed "high hopes" for September's North Atlantic Council (NAC) visit to Georgia where she expected the alliance to reaffirm the results of the Bucharest NATO summit in preparation for December's ministerial. FM Schwarzenberg of the Czech Republic asked the NFG to make a firm statement in support of MAP for Georgia anyway. Bulgaria's Maya Dobreva, Director for Europe at MFA, backed the Czech call while Romania's Raduta Matache, State Secretary at MFA, went so far as to call on Georgia to prepare by crafting a mock MAP of its own. FM Sikorski, as moderator of the discussion, reminded participants that those opposed to MAP were not likely to change by December and asked what else the NFG might do. This led to a discussion of other-than-MAP options for December: pushing for greater EU involvement, waiting until NATO's 60th anniversary to offer MAP, producing a joint NATO-Georgia statement reaffirming Georgia's sovereignty, or pursuing something similar at the UNGA.

¶3. (C) While acknowledging the value of these alternatives, DAS Bryza offered strong U.S. support for MAP itself. He underscored that within the context of MAP deliberations, we could moderate destabilizing behavior in the Caucasus by

asking MAP skeptics to declare that continued friction could lead them to change their vote and actually support MAP for Georgia. He noted that in any case the way forward had to include: a clear political cost to Russia for violations, direct Abkhaz-Georgian dialogue, and readiness of the international community to offer diplomatic and financial support for Georgia's peace plan, as well as a forum for direct Georgian-Abkhaz talks. Bryza also pressed for EU member states to consider offering personnel/trainers/mentors to a possible international police force for Abkhazia, as well as potential sanctions against Russian persons/entities that conduct business illegally in Abkhazia. Most delegations responded positively; Polish FM Sikorski said Poland might be able to contribute police.

The EU's Role

¶4. (C) The EU's Special Representative for the South Caucasus, Peter Semneby, offered perspective from Brussels. Georgia is an increasingly divisive issue in the EU. But there seemed to be a place for "sensible" Russian involvement. Indeed, the Abkhaz have claimed a need for Russian security while also welcoming greater EU involvement.

There is an "opening" to the EU for Abkhazia "if they follow the rules." The EU should consider bringing something of direct interest at the "grass roots," perhaps police. The EU could also rehabilitate Abkhaz railways.

¶5. (C) The subject of passports and visas also surfaced. FM Tkeshelashvili described how Georgia had completed an audit

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of its civil registry to strengthen passport controls. Czech FM Schwarzenberg stated that Russian passports for Abkhaz should not be the norm.

Georgia's Concerns

¶6. (C) With some friendly sarcasm, Georgian FM Tkeshelashvili asked that the NFG "temper" their realism with some optimism -- "The fight is not yet over." According to her, the Bucharest Summit offered a dangerous mix of commitment and hesitation that tempted the Russians to interfere, with possibilities for escalation. She cautioned that the window of opportunity was closing. "The Germans have told us that their position (on MAP) might be changeable if Russia continues its current course. We should convince the Russians that their actions will expedite, not deter, MAP for Georgia." She called for a clear cost to Russia for impeding the peace process, expressing concern that Gazprom is about to negotiate with the Republic of Abkhazia." She called for "positive actions that can change the context of the situation. We have good ideas but Russia does what it wants regardless." Tkeshelashvili led the call for EU actions, including economic involvement and "civil actions," to discourage Russia's annexation policy. She suggested rehabilitation of hospitals or schools in a joint Georgian-Abkhaz project.

Georgia's Bottom Line

¶7. (C) FM Tkeshelashvili closed by underscoring that Putin's dangerous decree of April 16 established a quasi-legal infrastructure for further Russian annexation and therefore had to be rolled back. With EU involvement, Georgia would be more flexible on the timing and format of a conflict resolution process, including accepting the presence of multi-national police. The EU must engage Abkhazia to provide an alternative to the Russian Federation and

demonstrate that this is a European issue. Georgia and the EU should work together to provide the Abkhaz some breathing space, and thereby entice them into substantive settlement talks.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: FM Tkeshelashvili seemed to signal an urgent need for "European" help sooner rather than later in order to avoid a dangerous escalation of the situation in the South Caucasus. Thankfully, she was forward-leaning in agreeing to an international police force and flexibility in the peace process. However, she clearly cautioned that "restraint is no longer an option." END COMMENT.

¶9. (U) DAS Bryza cleared this cable.
ASHE